

EDITORIAL

When I started this publication as *ETH Bulletin*, I hoped that ufologists would point to cases they regarded as evidence for the ETH. However, it was not to be, and the ETH continues to weaken, particularly in Britain, where ufologists are becoming clearly divided between those who wish to seek rational explanations and those who find the ETH a source of lucrative book contracts, appearances on TV chat shows, etc., rather than a basis for scientific investigation.

SOUTHPORT UFO CONFERENCE

Having being unbolted from his armchair, your Editor attended the Lancashire UFO Society's conference in Southport on 27 February. The fairly informal proceedings were presided over by Tim Matthews. He was wearing combat trousers, presumably to indicate that he was ready to deal with any troublemakers, but this year there was no hint of violence. The only disturbing event - or, rather, non-event - was the failure of copies of his eagerly awaited book to arrive at the conference hall as expected. However, there were rumours of a copy having been sighted in a bookshop in Manchester. (At the time of writing I have not yet seen it.)

The first speaker was Jerry Anderson, of UFO Monitors East Kent (UFOMEK), who, as far as I could tell, was the only southerner present at this northern venue. Anderson started off with an interesting close-encounter story from a man, now aged 84, who had had his strange experience in 1954. Hearing strange noises in the early mornings, he decided to investigate and encountered a silver object suspended above trees, with four or five small beings underneath it, collecting samples with tweezers and putting them into what looked like jam jars. He got to within 20 feet from the object when the beings saw him and they got back into their saucer, which went straight up and then took off at great speed in the usual manner.

The main part of his talk concerned the Burmarsh incident of 8 March 1997 and its apparently endless ramifications. This case concerns a UFO allegedly seen near the residence of the then Home Secretary, Michael Howard, and the incident generated a great deal of publicity at the time. One of the lines of investigation pursued by UFOMEK was the usual one of writing vexatious letters to the Ministry of Defence, and getting the inevitable standard replies. This was accompanied by the usual paranoid stuff, notably a fake letter and a recorded telephone call. The fake letter, sent to Chris Rolfe, purported to be written by a Wing Commander A.W. Ward of the RAF, and warned him to cease his investigations into the Burmarsh incident. Eventually UFOMEK established that this officer really existed and managed to contact him. He wrote to Rolfe denying having written the letter, but his signature was remarkably similar to that on the fake letter. Make of that what you will.

On 9 February 1999, Anderson received by mail a tape cassette, which he found to be a recording of a telephone conversation he had had with Chris Rolfe in January 1998, concerning the Burmarsh incident. He played part of the recording to us, and it was obvious that it had not been made from a telephone tap, but had obviously been made in the room where Anderson was making the call. He admitted that BT investigators found no evidence of a telephone tap. He called in an independent investigator (unnamed), who suggested that the conversation had been recorded from outside his house using a laser directional microphone. This is possible, of course, but a simpler explanation would be that he had his recorder running when he made the call, and the tape somehow got into the hands of one of his associates, who then decided to use it to hoax him. Who knows?

UFOMEK is also excited about a piece of security video footage which is said to show a triangular UFO moving very slowly over the Thames at Gravesend. According to the report published by UFOMEK, it has been viewed by 'independent analysts and experts in aircraft recognition have viewed the footage. . . video experts [unnamed] have said that it is a solid object . . .' The video was shown to us. It was of rather poor quality, but to me the object looked remarkably like a fractostratus cloud.

Just as Father Christmas appears in every big store in December, Jenny Randles appears at almost every UFO conference (although there are no reliable reports of her having been seen at more

than one conference at the same time). Jenny's talk was a minutely detailed account of the investigations into the notorious Peter Day film of January 1973, which concluded that the moving light on the film was burning fuel ejected by an F-111 jet which was in trouble and which later crashed.

During lunch time Tim Matthews discussed, for those who had given up eating for Lent, some of the material from his book concerning military aircraft mistaken for UFOs.

The real highlights of the conference were the lectures by Dr David Clarke and Andy Roberts. Dr Clarke described the Howden Moor incident of 1997 when police and rescue teams spent about £50,000 of public money searching for a non-existent crashed aircraft, and all because the Ministry of Defence refused to admit that one of their aircraft had illegally broken the sound barrier while flying at a low altitude over the area. He pointed out that the case never involved any suggestion of UFO activity until some dubious characters started spreading fantastic and unfounded rumours. However, there were a few loose ends, including a low flying light aircraft, which was videotaped. Attempts to identify this aircraft were unsuccessful.

Andy Roberts stunned the few believers in the audience with his neat demolition job on the Berwyn Mountain case of 1974, which some of the nuttier (or more mercenary) ufologists have been touting as the British Roswell. Some ufologists are not pleased with his investigations; he said that Nick Redfern accused him of being a disinformation agent.

Roberts demonstrated how the story had developed from the misinterpretation of real events on the night in question. At 8.30 p.m. on the evening of 23 January 1974 there was a loud explosion, accompanying an earth tremor, centred in the Bala area. Also on that evening, at least three bright meteors were seen, including a particularly spectacular one at 9.30 p.m.

Much is made by sensationalists of the story of the nurse who drove up into the mountains thinking there might have been a plane crash and that maybe she could help. Roberts found that this story was true, except for the bit about her being turned back by soldiers. She had encountered no one on the mountain. The persistent story about people being turned away from the mountain probably arose from confusion with an incident in 1982 when an RAF plane crashed in the area and the crash site was sealed off until the wreckage was cleared up.

The strange lights seen by the nurse were not from a grounded UFO, but were caused by a confrontation between police officers with torches and poachers using powerful lights attached to their car. Roberts had carefully checked this using maps and official documents. An RAF Mountain Rescue team checked the area the day after the incident and found nothing unusual. Let us fervently hope that we will hear no more nonsense about the Berwyn Mountain incident.

The conference ended with an informal session in which members of the audience were invited to air their views. The first speaker was a man with a Liverpool accent and a voice too loud even for your deaf old Editor. He deplored scepticism and declared that all the more fantastic UFO theories were true. As he rambled on, there was much consulting of watches as people decided it was time to head for the car park or railway station.

BOOK REVIEWS

Tony Dodd. *Alien Investigator: The Case Files of Britain's Leading UFO Detective*, Headline, London, 1999. £16.99

It all began on a night in January 1978, when Sergeant Tony Dodd of the North Yorkshire Police had a close encounter with a UFO when driving across the moors with a colleague. When he eventually retired from the police force, Dodd began to devote himself full time to UFO research. He claims to use his police experience 'to tackle the subject in a hard-headed, disciplined manner'. Presumably this means not believing everything that one would like to believe and being able to distinguish between facts and fantasies, as well as demanding sound evidence to back up extraordinary claims.

It is all too obvious, though, that if Dodd had conducted his police work in the same way that he pursues his UFO research, his career would have not lasted long. He believes that people who have close encounters are specially chosen and that the aliens communicate with him telepathically. These are the good aliens, of course. There are also the bad aliens who mutilate animals. In fact, there are several different lots of aliens buzzing around the Earth, and Dodd obviously has a hard time trying to sort out which lot is which.

Being so active in ferreting out UFO secrets, Dodd is plagued by the activities of secret agents who tap his telephone, follow him around, and generally hassle him. One would think that an experienced police officer would have ways of dealing with this sort of treatment, but Dodd never takes the obvious actions. For example, he is followed around by a car and uses his knowledge of the local roads to get on its tail. This is where he can get its registration number and have it checked out. But he makes no mention of attempting to identify its owner. At a UFO conference in Tucson, Arizona, he was approached by 'two dark-suited men' who told him they were from the US government, and proceeded to warn him about the line of research he was pursuing. Strangely, he

makes no mention of asking for evidence of their authority to question him.

Perhaps the most amusing stories concern Dodd's interest in alleged UFO incidents in Iceland. His contacts there gave his phone number to Icelandic trawlermen who took to ringing him up and telling him fantastic stories about UFOs going in and out of the sea. Dodd apparently takes all these reports at face value, apparently blind to the probability that they are pulling his leg.

I could write a much longer review of this book, but I am sure that there are other British ufologists busily dissecting it. I eagerly await their comments.

Jenny Randles. *UFO Crash Landing? Friend or Foe?*, Blandford, London, 1998. £9.99

By her own confession Jenny Randles says she is obsessed by the Rendlesham Forest mystery. What were UFOs and aliens doing there during the Christmas of 1980? Has there been a cover-up? What is being covered up? Who is telling the truth?

Like most aspects of ufology, a fog of confusion surrounds this case. Randles gives most credence to the sightings on the evening of 25 December and early morning of 26 December. Over the same period Cosmos 749 and 1226 re-entered our atmosphere, and were viewed throughout Britain. From this Randles speculates that a project named Cobra Mist, based at Orford Ness, had used some form of electrical beam energy weapon to shoot at these satellites.

Another possibility is that a Soviet satellite's nuclear motor might have been recovered at Rendlesham, or that a secret USAF plane had crash landed. Then again it could have been an extraterrestrial visitor, or some form of natural phenomenon. Randles likes to keep her options open and her conclusions as slippery as a tin of grease!

Such events would necessitate a cover-up, but if one was needed why would USAF officers blab needlessly to personnel at RAF Watton about a UFO landing? More to the point, why did 'Steve Roberts' tell Brenda Butler, only a week after the events, that aliens had communicated with USAF personnel through sign language, and were protected by armed guards whilst they repaired their craft? This account is similar to Larry Warren's, yet his testimony is disputed by those who were in Rendlesham Forest at the time in question. Furthermore, Steve Roberts's post on the base was later found to be connected with public affairs.

The actual evidence itself is not that great either. There is Halt's memo that mentions 'unexplained lights', the infamous tape recording made during the sightings (which even Randles notes, compares well with sightings of the Orford Ness lighthouse beams), landing marks in the ground and radioactivity. Unfortunately, the site itself was quickly destroyed and its exact location is so confused that Randles wonders if a false landing site was created to put people off the scent. No substantial documentary evidence has been discovered, and the testimony of the eyewitnesses is contradictory or just plain ludicrous.

This whole saga is mainly a great laugh at the gullibility of ufologists running around chasing their own tails/tales. In comparison Roswell seems like a sensible case to believe in.

Nigel Watson

LETTERS

The pieces in *Supplement* No. 12 raise some interesting points. Martin Kottmeyer's points out the role of Betty Hill's fears of radiation in the construction of her dream narratives. There were very good reasons why radiation poisoning would have been on Betty's (and many other people's) mind at that time. On 1 September 1961 the Soviet Union had ended its nuclear testing moratorium and exploded a giant 50+ megaton nuclear bomb, with further tests on the 4th and 5th, and on the 16th the US retaliated by resuming its nuclear testing. Radiation was in the air that weekend in more ways than one.

Is Jerry Clark really as naive as his letter suggests, or is this just a rhetorical device to initiate a Socratic dialogue with Magonians? Sorry Jerry, but the problems of misperception have nothing to do with the witnesses being American, but everything to do with them being humans and not Vulcans. *Magonia's* views on this topic are based on studies of the perceptual processes by real scientists rather than populist political correctness. Modern theories of perception stress that it is much more a creative than a recording act (see for example the new book by Donald Hoffman, *Visual Intelligence: How we create what we see*, Norton, 1998, or the works of Richard Gregory). Far from being some sort of pathology, these misperceptions may be giving us some important clues as to how the human perceptual processes work. That being the case, it doesn't seem so surprising that many cases of 'powerful searchlights' turn out to be accounts of bright stars and planets.

David Hufford's point was that the hag stories were based on real experiences of aware sleep paralysis episodes, and were not just a literary tradition. He was not, I think, arguing that the hags were really beings in external space. It's a moot point whether the hag experience is entirely hallucinatory or, as Ronald Siegel suggested, on analysing his own hag experience, constructed from

ambiguous sensory stimuli (the sound of his own blood, shadows, etc.). Most, but by no means all, UFO stories are based on real experiences, but that doesn't mean that folk interpretations of these experiences in terms of flying saucers or airships are correct.

With these problems of perception, detailed scientific studies of 'persistent ufological objects' are very important. Perhaps, therefore, Jerry could give us the precise bibliographic references to the articles in mainstream, peer reviewed, scientific journals where the Jet Propulsion Laboratory report on the video tape he mentions can be found, and to the subsequent correspondence. To help us poor, ignorant Brits, maybe he could fill us in on exactly what the Jet Propulsion Laboratory does, what particular aspects of its day-to-day, bread-and-butter work give it particular expertise in analysing video recordings of lights in the sky, who exactly at the JPL undertook this research, and on contract from whom, what exactly his or her particular expertise in this field was; whether the work was done by the JPL as a corporate body, or by one or more employees as a personal project, what the results of any other analyses were, etc., etc. No doubt asking questions like that is a good way for me to end up being branded a trouble maker or even Torquemada.

It is sad to see Jerry reduced to this kind of ranting and arm waving (enlivened, no doubt, with the occasional piece of grammatical nit picking) instead of reasoned argument. Dare one suggest that this is because Jerry knows he has lost it, and it is that amalgam of intellectual laziness and superstition which seeks explanations of scientific puzzles in terms of non-human intelligences of ill-defined natures and powers (whether ET or boggart matters not a jot) which actually stands rightfully accused of 'explaining everything' and therefore nothing.

Of course, in the interest of fairness and balance, it is equally dismaying to see Philip Klass relying on a phone conversation years ago with someone whose name he can't remember as his evidence for the light aircraft theory. Gossip isn't evidence.

Peter Rogerson, Manchester

Reference Jerome Clark's letter (in your February issue) about the 'Hudson Valley UFOs' which involved many night-time reports of a giant boomerang-shaped UFO observed in 1983-84. Clark seemingly rejects the idea that most if not all of these UFO reports were triggered by half a dozen daredevil private pilots flying in close formation.

The September/October 1983 issue of Clark's own *International UFO Reporter (IUR)* published an article by Philip Imbrogno and two other investigators which stated: 'Although a part of the mystery has been solved . . . in some cases a group of pilots were apparently deliberately conducting close flight formations in small planes . . . there is as yet no explanation for the slow moving, silent, and at times hovering "Boomerang" . . . On July 14, I staked out the area of the Stormville [NY] airport and verified that some of the [UFO] reports were the result of these planes flying in formation.' This was an embarrassing admission for Imbrogno whose article in the previous issue of *IUR* suggested that there was no possible prosaic explanation for the boomerang UFO reports. Several months later an article in the *Poughkeepsie Journal* quoted Imbrogno as saying: 'The aircraft theory explains perhaps 75 percent, but it does not rule out a great deal of the remaining reports.'

By that time, Imbrogno had decided to write a book about the Hudson Valley boomerang UFOs, in partnership with Dr J. Allen Hynek, then head of the Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS). In the November/December 1984 issue of *IUR*, Hynek wrote an editorial which criticised a recent issue of *Discover* magazine for its report on its on-site investigation which indicated the Hudson Valley reports were generated by the daredevil pilots. In Hynek's editorial he posed the question: 'Can it be established [i.e., proven] that all of the UFO sightings are due to slap-happy pilots?'

No it can't. But consider the alternative - that the ETs in some distant galaxy decided to design and build a new type of spacecraft, shaped like a giant boomerang. And they chose to send it to the Hudson valley in 1983 where daredevil private pilots were then flying in a boomerang-type formation to create *bogus* UFO reports. If any of the boomerang-shaped UFOs were ET craft, how very strange that they *repeatedly* returned to the Hudson Valley area where the pilot-hoaxers were operating and did not visit other areas of the US, or other countries. (One possible explanation is that ETs also were fooled by the daredevil pilots and thought their boomerang was another ET craft.)

Clark should know that eyewitness reports of lights-in-the-night-sky type UFOs are often inaccurate. For example, when CUFOS's chief investigator Allan Hendry investigated 1,024 such UFO reports submitted to CUFOS in the mid-1970s, *all of them turned out to have prosaic explanations*, as Hendry reported in his book, *The UFO Handbook*.

As for the reports that the boomerang UFO seemed to hover, if Clark will stand in the small park in front of our Condo complex and watch airliners approaching to land at nearby Reagan National Airport at night, he will be able to swear under oath that the airliners *appeared to hover* for 5-10 seconds.

Philip J. Klass, Washington, D.C.

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